

## ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION

A clean-up system recaptures part of the memory or secondary storage space on a client device, such as a handheld personal computer. E-mail messages are organized in a hierarchy of folders within a database. Each folder may or may not contain e-mail messages. Preferably, a user downloads e-mail messages from a server to the client device. Upon placing e-mail messages into a folder, a flag set module marks the folder with a cleanup flag. The user marks any folders, messages from which he wishes to use upon disconnect from the server, for off-line use. The clean-up system parses the folder hierarchy, beginning with the first folder in the hierarchy. A clean-up module determines if the clean-up flag is set for the first folder. If the cleanup flag is set for the first folder, an off-line module determines if the folder is marked for off-line use. If the folder is marked for off-line use, the messages contained within the folder are retained for later use. If the folder is not marked for off-line use, a delete module deletes the messages contained within the folder, recapturing part of the memory or secondary storage space on the client device. This routine is repeated for each folder within the hierarchy of folders.